

JOHN JAMES ABERT, TO JOHN JAMES AUDUBON.

(Hitherto unpublished letters.)

BY RUTHVEN DEANE.

THE following letters written by John James Abert are based upon information and specimens furnished by his son, Lieut. James William Abert, who in 1848 wrote his 'Report of an examination of New Mexico in the years 1846-7.' Lieut. Abert was at that time an officer of Topographical Engineers.

In each of these letters reference is made to a partridge, then unknown to them, which in the Report of 1848, had been identified as the Scaled Partridge (*Callipepla squamata*). While this species was first described by Vigors in 1830 from specimens sent from old Mexico, those collected by Lieut. Abert were the first records for the United States. The only quotation from Abert's Report referring to this partridge which I find, is by Cassin,¹ but these letters are particularly interesting as they antedate any published records of the Scaled Partridge for our fauna. Mr. Ridgway writes me that none of these specimens found their way into the Smithsonian collection, but Mr. Witmer Stone writes, "I am happy to say we have one of the Abert Scaled Partridges in the Philadelphia Academy (No. 24331, December, 1846, New Mexico); it is mounted and in good shape." These letters are copied "verbatim, literatim et punctuatim" and I am under many obligations to Miss M. Eliza Audubon for the privilege of publishing them.

Dear Sir :

My son Lieut. A.² has some taste for Natural History. He has just returned from Santa Fe, having been on General Kearney's³ expedition. He had learned to prepare bird skins & had prepared many, but unfortunately during a long & Severe illness his Skins and arsenick were lost — when he recovered he prepared a few

¹ Illustrations of the Birds of California, Texas, Oregon, British and Russian America. Philadelphia, 1856, p. 129.

² James William Abert, born November 18, 1820; died August 10, 1897.

³ General Stephen Watts Kearney, born August 30, 1794; died October 31, 1848.

Skins with corn-meal and has brought them in, in good condition, what should now be done with them. Among these skins are some of a quail or Partridge¹ which I do not find among your birds of America. It is about the size of our quail, but totally different in color, being ash or lead color. Also the skin of a lark,² not larger than our house sparrow and brown. Also 3 or 4 Skins of what I think (but I have not yet compared) is the Shafted Woodpecker,³ a Skin of the Meadow Lark,⁴ differing slightly in plumage from ours, but totally different in its notes. Some Skins also of (probably) the ultra-marine Jay.⁵

He says our Prairie Dog (a marmot) does not hibernate but is out all winter as lively and as fast as on any Summer day. He has a skin of one. Also a skin of the black tailed hare, and of a rabbit, the latter much smaller than our rabbit, and of a Skunk so differently marked from any that I have ever seen, or have ever seen described, that there may be something new in it. The ears of his hare, differ from those of the drawing you once showed me, being much wider, rather leaf shaped. May not these add something to our contributions to Science.

Yours

J. J. Abert.⁶

J. J. Audubon Esq.

April 7 '47

¹ In the Report of 1848, Lieut. Abert writes, "December 9, 1846. Spent the morning hunting quails in the vicinity of the 'mesa' below; procured a female '*ortix squamosa*.' December 12, 1846. I obtained five beautiful specimens of the '*ortix squamosa*,' as the arsenic that we had obtained in St. Louis has been taken to California I was obliged to fill the skins with corn meal."

² Referable to one of several forms of the Shore Lark. In the Report of 1848 Lieut. Abert frequently refers to the large flocks of *Alauda alpestris*.

³ Undoubtedly the Red-shafted Woodpecker (*Colaptes cafer*). In the Report of 1848, under date of December 8, 1846, is given: "We procured several specimens of the red-winged flicker *picus Mexicanus*."

⁴ *Sturnella neglecta*. In the Report of 1848, under date of December 5, 1846, is given: "On my return I got five specimens of the Mexican Meadow lark '*Sturnella neglecta*.'"

⁵ Probably referable to Woodhouse's Jay (*Aphelocoma woodhouseii*).

⁶ John James Abert, born September 17, 1788; died September 27, 1863. Became Colonel in command of topographical engineers in 1838, one of the organizers of the National Institute of Science, which subsequently merged into the Smithsonian Institution.

Dear Sir.

I have sent you a copy of my son's first expedition to the Rocky Mountains.¹ The report of his second, from which he has just returned is, of course, not yet made out. I shall talk to him about the subjects of your letter.

It was after an examination of your small edition of the birds of America that I considered the Quail a new one. There is certainly nothing like it in that work, unless it be out of place in the book and in that way has escaped my examination. A person of some knowledge in these matters, who has seen the skins, calls it a new bird, but there is no one of sufficient authority to depend upon.

Yours truly

J. J. Abert

J. J. Audubon Esq.

12 April '47

Dear Sir

There are two birds brought in by my son which we have not yet been able to find described by any one, one is a Quail and the other a *Sialia*.² Our examination in reference to the latter, have not yet been very thorough. It was only yesterday that the skins had got through the thorough preparation you advised in order to preserve them. His mamalian skins are now going through a similar process. He says he will send them on for your inspection when cured and when an opportunity shall offer, the Skunk is a singular skin in its markings, and differing from anything that I have seen.

Yours

J. J. Abert.

27 April '47.

J. J. Audubon Esq.

¹ Notes on a Military Reconnoissance, from Fort Leavenworth in Missouri, to San Diego, in California. By W. H. Emery, 1848. Appendix No. 6. Notes by Lieutenant J. W. Abert, pp. 386-405.

² In the Report of 1848, under date of December 7, 1846, Lieut. Abert writes: "During the morning I was busily engaged in skinning birds, we had eight Mexican blue birds '*sialia occidentalis*'. They differ from the blue birds of the United States in having the back brown and the wings tipped with black and are more delicate in their contour."

Dear Sir

The *Sialia* brought in by Lt. A. is, I think, the "Western Blue Bird", but we cannot yet identify the partridge with anything in your book. It is decidedly a dove colored bird, slightly tinged with brown, a longer tail than our quail and full as large. He saw many of them and brought in six skins. Peale¹ is disposed to think it new. He saw the skins in the hands of Pollard,² who was employed to put them up. I have advised Lt. A. to describe this bird without delay.

Yrs.

J. J. Abert.

28 April '47.

J. J. Audubon Esq.

SOME NEW AND RARE BIRD RECORDS FOR
MICHIGAN.

BY NORMAN A. WOOD.

[University Museum, University of Michigan.]

DURING the summer of 1904 these records were made by Messrs. A. G. Ruthven, Otto McCreary, W. A. Maclean, Max M. Peet and the writer, while members of the Museum Expedition to the Porcupine Mountains and Isle Royale. A detailed report on the ornithological results will be published later.

Prof. W. B. Barrows of the Michigan Agricultural College is preparing a volume on the birds of Michigan, which he expects to publish at an early date. At his suggestion the following records are published in advance of the regular report, in order that they may be incorporated in his forthcoming volume.

No attempt will be made to prove that all of these are "breed-

¹Titian Ramsey Peale, born 1800, died March 13, 1885. He accompanied the South Sea Exploring Expedition in 1838-42, under Lieut. Charles Wilkes, as Naturalist.

²Pollard. An assistant in taxidermical work under Titian R. Peale.